

ASEM: Interregionalism in the Search for the End of the Crisis

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Abstract

By surveying and evaluating recent trends in the relations between Europe and Asia during the main crisis period (2010 – 2012), the paper strives to perform a conceptual and empirical analysis of a multi-level and global governance in the context of interregional cooperation with a particular focus on the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). In order to tease out its characterizing traits and allow for its utilization in the debated context, the article intends to further develop the theoretical conceptualisation of interregionalism and to revive the stagnating debate over this concept with regard to

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the current financial and economic crisis. The article draws five main conclusions: (1) ASEM as an interregional framework is too flexible (in terms of agenda-setting) and too inclusive (in terms of enlargement). (2) Given the incapability of ASEM to react proactively to various challenges influencing its Member States, interregionalism cannot be considered as a fully-fledged contribution to multi-level or global governance. (3) Additionally, interregionalism in the context of the Asia-Europe Meeting will not result in the establishment of the “Eurasian Century” of leadership, despite the unquestionable need for more result-oriented policy frameworks stemming from the crisis period. (4) Interregionalism as a policy approach thus cannot be reduced to a loose interaction of nation states or regions because it will require a properly organized cooperation framework. (5) Finally, the bilateral framework of cooperation between individual Asian and European states is much more efficient at this moment.

Key words: ASEM, APEC, crisis, interregionalism

Introduction

“Post-global financial crisis world will be increasingly dominated by China and the United States.”(Global Policy, 2012)

Even though the economic interdependence between Europe and Asia is growing, their formalized interregional cooperation on a global field is rather questioned or even completely ignored by contemporary international relations practitioners and academicians. Even worse, some scholars articulate a vision of a world predominantly based on the cooperation of the Group of Two (G-2) leading to a clear marginalisation of Europe (Foreign Policy, 2008). Therefore, in order to handle the challenges stemming from globalization, individual states, regions, international organisations, NGOs or other actors in the international arena have to develop new types of governance.

The former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated in her “America's Pacific Century” discourse that “the future of politics will be decided in Asia, not Afghanistan or Iraq, and the United States will be right at the centre of the action” (Foreign Policy, 2011). She concludes that the Asia-Pacific might become a key

driving force of global politics very soon. "Stretching from the Indian subcontinent to the western shores of the Americas, the region spans two oceans – the Pacific and the Indian – that are increasingly linked by shipping and strategy." (Foreign Policy, 2011)

But what about Europe, which is geographically and historically situated even closer to Asia than the United States? Is there a specific policy approach that would help place Europe right at the centre of future political actions that could be decided in Asia? In the 1990s, the European Union explicitly declared its interest in closer ties with Asia under the framework of interregional cooperation, which later resulted in establishment of the so-called Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM).

This leads us to a question about which policy approach will prove to be sustainable, efficient and operational enough to face and mitigate various dilemmas such as the economic and financial crisis or economic and political imbalances stemming from globalization. For almost two decades, Europe and Asia have been searching for such a framework. Through existing bilateral relations and multilateral fora and organisations, both Europe and East Asia already endeavour to influence other countries, regions

and the global community. Nevertheless, the current theoretical and empirical debate over different types of governance lacks certain research on how both Europe and Asia could exercise influence over the world – facing crisis – through advancing their emerging interregional relationship.

Interregionalism is generally considered as a sub-theory that is based upon, or largely contained within, another grand theory. Needless to say, no other sub-theory of international relations has been as pilloried, misunderstood or caricatured as often as interregionalism. Notwithstanding the fact that current scholars do not share a clearly united theoretical conceptualisation of interregionalism, most scholars uniformly study interregionalism as a geographical process that is based on common sense of a regional identity aimed at striking a balance with other regions. However, this geopolitical and rather neorealist interpretation of interregionalism fails to examine the process from the policy (governance) point of view.

Furthermore, relevant research on interregionalism as an organizing principle of the Asia-Europe Meeting has recently been stagnating. The last works devoted to the conceptual debate over interregionalism in the context of ASEM date between 2002 and

2008 only. However, a majority of contemporary scholars³ discussing international regionalism and regionalisation have turned their attention to an alternative interregional framework driven by the Asia-Pacific community – the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the related Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Recognizing the considerable disinterest of scholars and the general public in ASEM, following up the rather incomplete and one-sided research on interregionalism and applying the indicators of global governance defined by Holger Mürle, the paper attempts to evaluate interregionalism as a policy approach at the level of global (multi-level) governance with a particular focus on the Asia-Europe Meeting in the crisis period 2010-2012.

Intending to advance the current debate over interregionalism, we will put considerable emphasis on the theoretical underpinnings and debates on interregionalism in the context of globalization, regionalisation and related governance. In addition, we will examine whether the ongoing economic and financial crisis had any impact on the interregional process. To sum up, the paper seeks to contribute to the theoretical and empirical evidence

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regarding whether interregionalism can lead to an effective global (multi-level) governance with the establishment of the “Eurasian Century” of leadership. It will be assumed that the difficulties in contemporary global governance and related disinterest in institutional narrative in international affairs, as an interregional process, the Asia-Europe Meeting has a rather a limited impact on further deepening relations between Europe and Asia. Therefore, in order to be able to lay the foundation for a new Eurasian leadership, the Asia-Europe Meeting must undergo dramatic changes.

The first part of the paper outlines basic theoretical concepts and terminology linked to interregionalism. The chapter will guide us to comprehend the place of interregionalism in the new level of governance, its perspectives and potential for use in a particular case of Eurasian cooperation. The second chapter of the paper will look more closely at the specific case of interregional cooperation between Europe and Asia – the Asia-Europe Meeting. The third chapter of the paper will focus on the final reflection of the ASEM interregional process. The chapter is divided into two parts. The first part draws final conclusions from the qualitative analysis of the ASEM Chair’s Statements in light of the initial ambitious plans

and strategies. The second part contributes to the debate over potential development and the direction of interregionalism. In this regard, we will also demonstrate how an alternative example of interregional cooperation fits into the debate over changing the concept of interregionalism.

Theoretical Implications: Interregionalism in the ASEM Context

First, we will look more closely at the specific case of interregional cooperation between Europe and Asia – the Asia-Europe Meeting. In order to evaluate what has been achieved and what impact the interregional narrative has on the mutual Eurasian relations, we will first outline the basic theoretical contours of the cooperation. Afterwards, we will confront these theoretical implications with empirical evidence.

We have segmented the following chapter into three parts, each of which presents the Asia-Europe Meeting from a different perspective. The first part analyses the fundamental reasoning behind the establishment of ASEM. The second part looks at the key characteristics of the ASEM as a process while the third evaluates ASEM in the context of international relations.

Starting Points and Reasoning of the ASEM Process

Reflecting the new global post-Cold War context and the global perspectives of the 21st century, the summitry origins of the Asia-Europe Meeting process were based on a common vision to cooperate closer between Europe and Asia and on a shared recognition that the mutual relations between the two regions had to be reinforced and strengthened (European Commission, 2012).

In this spirit, the European Commission published a Communication to the Council called “Towards a New Strategy for Asia” in July 1994, underlining the political, economic and cultural significance of Asia and initiating the modernisation of the relationship with Asia. It is thus necessary to bear in mind that ASEM does not feature a traditional treaty establishing the process (European Commission, 1994).

The overall objectives of this European “rediscovery” of Asian region were to strengthen the Union’s economic presence in Asia, to contribute to stability in Asia by promoting international co-operation and understanding, to promote the economic development of the less prosperous countries and regions in Asia,

to contribute to the development and consolidation of democracy and the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in Asia.

Furthermore, the European Union called for a “set of clear policy priorities across Asia” (European Commission, 1994, p. 4), which proves the existence of a common strategy of one region towards another region. The EU basically strived for strengthening its bilateral relations not only with individual countries, but also with the region(s) in Asia. The Communication also mentioned explicitly:

“the support for effort by Asian countries to cooperate at the regional and subregional level such as the ASEAN Regional Forum with a view to enhancing peace and security in the region and generally to strengthen the Union's relations with regional groups such as ASEAN or SAARC”.(European Commission, 1994, p. 4)

Another EU priority was:

“to associate Asian countries in the management of international affairs and in particular to encourage them to play a more active role in multilateral actions with a view to

maintaining international peace and security". (European Commission, 1994, p. 4-7)

Among other priorities and policies, the EU Communication also emphasized the necessity to expand Euro-Asian trade and investments, to promote market-oriented economies and sustainable development, and to alleviate poverty in Asia's least prosperous countries.

Most importantly, in order to meet these ambitious goals, the EU sets out various Asia-related policies. For instance, the Communication mentions bilateral relations (i.e. dialogue with individual countries and regions in Asia), multilateral co-operation (i.e. wide-ranging dialogue with Asia within the UN system), commercial policy (i.e. mainly the liberalisation rounds with the GATT/WTO system), development and humanitarian aid (i.e. the EU being the second largest donor to Asia after Japan), and finally various investment and financial facilities (i.e. European Investment Bank as well as the European Community Investment Partners promoting new investments opportunities). By admitting that "the Union will not be able to take for granted automatic acceptance of European values and ways of doing things" (European Commission, 1994, p. 18) as before, the

Communication implicitly demonstrates that such a pattern of relations has to be reinforced and upgraded.

For that reason, in the wake of new global post-Cold War security and economic challenges and of Asia's search of a more prominent role on the world stage, the EU envisages a "new political approach towards Asia" (European Commission, 1994, pp. 7-13). Above all, this approach should be based on strengthening the political and security dialogue with Asia, including arms control and non-proliferation, human rights promotion, and immediate drug trafficking elimination. In addition, the EU intends to launch a new trade and co-operation strategy towards Asia as far as economic issues are concerned.

Given the (1) rapid economic growth in Asia and related opportunities and challenges, (2) variations in growth and emerging imbalances of the Triad (i.e. EU, North America, East Asia-) as well as (3) the structure of foreign direct investment, (4) sustainability of growth in developing Asia, (5) market transition and (6) finally state of poverty, the EU wants to transform its current economic relations with Asia and develop new pro-active strategies towards Asia based on covering:

“relations with regional groupings in Asia such as the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations); SAARC (South Asia Association for Regional Co-operation); sub-regional arrangements such as the numerous cross-border ‘growth triangles’ now emerging; and supra regional groups such as APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation), which link East Asia across the Pacific to the Americas and Australasia.”
(European Commission, 1994, p. 18)

Furthermore, the EU intends:

“to reinforce, or where it does not yet exist, establish a non-confrontational dialogue of equals, to address questions of bilateral concern and also to consider jointly the growing number of global concerns: most notably the maintenance of an open rule-based world trade system (...).”(European Commission, 1994, p. 18)

The assessment of the term “rules-based” is crucial in the forthcoming reflection of interregionalism. Correspondingly, the Communication stresses that such dialogue ought to go beyond purely bilateral structures and explicitly expresses support for regionalism and multilateralism:

“If the Union can assist in the development of a consensus approach, this will feed into inter-regional initiatives (e.g. APEC) and smooth the path for work undertaken at the multilateral level, for example concerning the post Uruguay Round agenda.” (European Commission, 1994, p. 19)

Last but not least, the Communication highlights selected benefits from the reinforcement of the European economic presence in Asia and other initiatives related to business, investments, trade, agriculture, environment, and research cooperation. In conclusion, the European Commission was seeking to establish an ambitious cooperation platform that would not only pursue its interests in a traditional bilateral way, but also in the framework of multilateral organisations. Hence, the Union was ready to strengthen its relationship with regional and subregional economic and political fora so as to promote pro-actively a wide-ranging cooperation. The 1994 Communication thus became an ideological cornerstone of the ASEM process that started in 1996. In this spirit, the Asian side accepted the basic principles without issuing their own separate Communication.

To complete the whole picture about the starting points of the ASEM, it is interesting to note that in September 2001 (five years

after the first ASEM summit took place in Bangkok), the European Commission revised and reaffirmed its objectives in another Communication to the Council called “Europe and Asia: A Strategic Framework for Enhanced Partnerships” (European Commission, 2001). In this Communication, the European Commission mainly focused on specification and reformulation of the previously proposed goals and objectives of its policies towards Asia, taking into account recent key economic and political developments.

Again, the Commission intended to establish a “comprehensive strategic framework for our relations with Asia and its subregions in the coming decade”. In addition, the Communication proposed:

“an overall strategic framework for our [EU’s] relations with Asia in the coming decade based on the core objective of strengthening the EU’s political and economic presence across the region, and raising this to a level commensurate with the growing global weight of an enlarged EU”.(European Commission, 2001, p. 3)

Most importantly, the EU envisages to build “global partnerships and alliances with Asian countries, in appropriate international fora, to help address both the challenges and the opportunities

offered by globalisation and to strengthen our joint efforts on global environmental and security issues” (European Commission, 2001, p. 3). Therefore, the updated Communication basically seeks to:

“review and update our [UE’s] approach to Asia, to provide a new strategic framework which will address the changes since 1994, and to establish a coherent, comprehensive and balanced strategic approach for our relations with Asia in the coming decade”.(European Commission, 2001, p. 5)

Even though the language is similarly ambiguous and shallow, understanding of the second Communication in the context of five years of ASEM’s existence is harder. With regard to the first Communication, one might have expected that the Eurasian interregional relations would have been institutionalized at some point. Nevertheless, the Communication only mentions that the EU and its Asian partners should “work together to strengthen global efforts in relation [to inter-regional as well as global issues]” (European Commission, 2001, p. 11), i.e. contributing to peace and security, mutual trade and investment flows, development of the less prosperous countries, spreading of democracy, good

governance and the rule of law etc.. Nonetheless, the European Commission at least admits that:

“upgrading the institutional basis for our [EU’s] relations with key partners in Asia would allow for a more coherent approach to all relevant issues (in the political and security fields as well as on economic and development issues), would create a powerful stimulus for the intensification of our [EU’s] dialogue and cooperation in all areas, and would give a clear public signal of the commitment of both parties to raise our relationship to a new level”. (European Commission, 2001, p. 12)

Another ambitious part underscores the interest in building “global partnerships and alliances with Asian countries”, such as international fora addressing both the challenges and the opportunities of globalisation (mainly global environmental and security issues). In this regard, the EU is committed to “provid[ing] active support for reinforced regional integration, on the basis of mutual solidarity within ASEAN” (European Commission, 2001, p. 22). Finally, concerning the implementation and resources, the European Commission underlined that:

“in order for this Strategic Framework to be fully effective, it is essential that there is a proper consistency between the objectives being set, and the resources available to meet them (both in terms of staff and operational resources in headquarters and in the field, and in terms of the budgetary resources available for our cooperation programmes).”(European Commission, 2001, p. 26)

In further evaluation of real ASEM's statements and declarations, it will be interesting to assess what has really been achieved, mainly with regard to the issue of headquarters and further institutionalisation of the ASEM process.

Key Characteristics of the Asia-Europe Meeting⁴

Only two months after the first European Commission's Communication had been released, Singapore and France proposed to organize an EU-Asia summit in November 1994 in order to bring to life the ambitious words about building a new strategic partnership between the two regions. Following

⁴ This chapter quotes substantial parts of the official website of the Asia-Europe Meeting and summarizes common knowledge about this inter-regional process. It is relevant for understanding and evaluating the inter-regional process.

Singapore's proposal, the first summit, called Asia-Europe Meeting, was held in Bangkok in March 1996, which marks the official commencement of the ASEM process (ASEM InfoBoard, 2013).

The Asia-Europe Meeting is an informal process of explicitly interregional dialogue between Europe and Asia which is based on a structure of three pillars that – as mentioned in the previous Communications – address various political, economic and cultural issues with the objective of deepening and strengthening the relationship between the two regions. Corresponding dialogues are coordinated by Ministers of Foreign Affairs and their Senior Officials (SOM) with the assistance of a group of Coordinators. Also, they co-organize high-level summits that are held every two years either in Europe or in Asia, in accordance with the country that holds the rotating presidency of the Asia-Europe Meeting. So far altogether nine summits have taken place (ASEM InfoBoard, 2013).

After the Asian presidency held by Laos (Vientiane) in November 2012, Europe now holds the presidency holder and will organize the following summit in Brussels in 2014 (ASEM InfoBoard, 2013). The summits represent a quasi-doctrinal and most significant

foundation of the entire ASEM “summitry” process. They are attended by the heads of states, relevant ministers, the President of the European Commission, and other representatives depending on the current agenda. In addition to the highest summit format, over 50 regular officials’⁵ and ministerial⁶ meetings at governmental level take place. Furthermore, ASEM initiates numerous workshops outside the government level by bringing together individual fora⁷, lawmakers, businesses and civil society groups (EEAS, 2013). Last but not least, various ad-hoc cooperation initiatives have been put in place so far. For example, the so called ASEM Trust Fund was set up as a reaction to the Asian Financial crisis so as to deliver technical support and advice on various reforms of the Asian financial sector and social policies (ASEM InfoBoard, 2013).

⁵ These include for instance the Customs Working Group, Finance Deputies Meeting, Meeting of Directors General of Immigration, Meetings of Directors-General of Customs, Senior Officials’ Meetings (SOM), and Senior Officials’ Meetings on Trade and Investment (SOMTI)

⁶ These include for instance the Economic Ministers Meetings, Finance Ministers Meetings, Environment Ministers Meetings, Foreign Ministers Meetings, Ministers of Education Meetings, Culture Ministers Meetings, and other Ministerial Meetings.

⁷ These include for instance the Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF), Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership Meeting (ASEP), Asia-Europe Peoples’ Forum (AEPF), and ASEM Eco-Innovation Center (ASEIC).

To sum up, the Asia-Europe Meeting has no Secretariat and follows the line of purely intergovernmental cooperation. The only official existing permanent ASEM institution is the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), which is described as “a not-for-profit foundation charged with promoting cultural, intellectual and people-to-people contacts between the two regions” (European Commission, 2010). Participating ASEM governments established the ASEF in February 1997. It is based in Singapore and funded by voluntary contributions coming from the governments with the purpose to finance projects related to civil society across Asia and Europe. ASEF has so far implemented approximately 600 projects, bringing together more than 17,000 direct participants and reaching out to an even wider audience in Asia and Europe (ASEF, 2013). These projects basically strive to promote “mutual understanding between Asia and Europe through intellectual, cultural and people-to-people exchanges” (ASEM InfoBoard, 2013).

Generally speaking, ASEM attempts to facilitate and stimulate progress in other fora, while it officially tries not to duplicate other bilateral or multilateral actions. The key features of the ASEM process include informality (i.e. non-binding character), multi-

dimensionality, and emphasis on equal partnership, dual focus on high-level and people-to-people level (ASEM InfoBoard, 2013). Therefore, given the informality of the ASEM process, specific co-operation initiatives outlined by the Coordinators and Heads of Governments are rather complementary in relation to their respective bilateral relations. This format of a multilateral diplomacy complies with Volker Rittberger's explanation of the process as a "conference diplomacy" (Rittberger, 1997).

As far as the official agenda is concerned, the Asia-Europe Meeting is supposed to provide a platform for addressing international matters such as the reorganization of the world financial system, trade and investment liberalization within the WTO rounds, as well as United Nations reforms, weapons of mass destruction issues, terrorism, or migration flows. During the third ASEM summit that was held in Seoul in the Republic of Korea in October 2000 (ASEM InfoBoard, 2013), the ASEM process was significantly formalized by systematically dividing its activities into three basic pillars, similar to the basket structure of the Conference on

Security and Cooperation in Europe: (1) political pillar⁸, (2) economic pillar,⁹ and (3) social, cultural and education pillar¹⁰.

As already mentioned above, the ASEM process emphasised on an “equal partnership, favouring general process of dialogue and cooperation based on mutual respect and mutual benefit” for the actors involved (ASEM InfoBoard, 2013). It brings together 27 European Union Member States, 2 countries of the so called European Free Trade Association¹¹ and the European Commission with 20 Asian countries and the ASEAN Secretariat. In total, 51 partners are involved in the ASEM process (49 countries and 2

⁸ The main fields of cooperation in this pillar include following chapters: addressing international and regional developments, reinforcing the multilateral system through effective multilateralism, security and anti-terrorism cooperation, dialogue on human rights and the rule of law, environmental dialogue and dialogue on migration.

⁹ The main fields of cooperation in this pillar include following chapters: promoting economic multilateralism, enhancing trade and investment frameworks, fostering dialogue on financial issues, managing crisis, promoting dialogue with the private sector, and the ASEM Task Force for Closer Economic Partnership.

¹⁰ The main fields of cooperation in this pillar include following chapters: promoting a dialogue on cultures and civilisations, the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), developing Europe-Asia Education Co-operation, the ASEM Education Process, developing cooperation on Information Technology (IT): Trans-Eurasian Information Network (TEIN), and reaching out to civil society and the wider public.

¹¹ Norway and Switzerland

international organizations). Interestingly enough, the value of the ASEM process was further enhanced through a broader participation, and therefore, the Asia-Europe Meeting has been enlarged in four phases in total and the number of partners has been basically doubled since the first summit took place, which undoubtedly illustrates a particular attractiveness of the Eurasian interregional process.

The initial ASEM partnership that was launched in Bangkok in 1996 consisted of 15 EU Member States,¹² 10 Member States of the so-called Association of South East Asian Nations¹³ and three other East Asia nations.¹⁴ The Asia-Europe Meeting saw its first enlargement at the 5th ASEM Summit that was organized in Hanoi in 2004, where the 10 new EU Member States¹⁵ and three new ASEAN countries¹⁶ officially became part of the ASEM process, increasing the total membership of ASEM to 39 partners. In 2007,

¹² Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom

¹³ Brunei, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam

¹⁴ China, Japan, and South Korea

¹⁵ Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia

¹⁶ Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar.

the second round of enlargement brought in Bulgaria, Romania, India, Mongolia, Pakistan, and the ASEAN Secretariat. In October 2010 in Brussels, the third enlargement was probably the most exceptional one because Australia, New Zealand and Russia were invited to the process. Finally, at the recent 9th Vientiane (Laos) ASEM Summit of Heads of Government and State, three new member states joined the ASEM process: Norway, Switzerland and Bangladesh. Together the ASEM partners represent around half of global GDP, approximately 58% of the world's total population, and more than 60% of international commerce (EEAS, 2013).

International Relations Narrative in the ASEM Process

It is evident that neither states nor regions can compete alone any longer, which is a crucial condition for the existence of the ASEM process. As previously mentioned, the Asia-Europe Meeting serves as an example of an interregional cooperation. Interregionalism as a system of relations within overlapping regional arrangement is frequently used also as a term in international relations theories. Nevertheless, it is still not regarded as a standard and autonomous international relations theory due to its crossover and multidimensional nature (Beroun, 2013). Furthermore, it does not attempt to provide a comprehensive conceptual framework for a

peace system upon which international relations are usually analysed after World War II.

Interregionalism is thus becoming rather an approach that is applied transitionally across the three standard and generally accepted theories of international relations which are (neo)realism (i.e. soft balancing in the sense of power and institutions stemming from an interlinked security and economic environment and declining effectiveness of hard military power) (Buzan, 1998), (neo)liberalism (i.e. economic globalization leading to prospective institutionalism) and constructivism (i.e. creation of mutual Eurasian identity, values, norms of behaviour, social interaction). (Beroun, 2011, pp. 365-389)

Owing to the fact that such a theoretical weakness of interregionalism has repeatedly raised doubts about this transitional conceptualisation, specific research on interregional relations is quite questionable due to difficulties in defining common conceptual basis among scholars. In order to cope with such a challenging theoretical impasse, regionalists argue that it is fundamentally vital to focus on the initial empirical roots and triadic perspective of the ASEM process (Hänggi, 1999, pp. 56-80). For instance, as Julie Gilson claims, "regional coalitions are formed

in order to redress or redefine power structures and counterbalance other equivalent regionalising forces.” (Gilson, 2002, p. 9) This perspective – implying the trilateral relationship between three capitalist world powers,¹⁷ i.e. the United States of America, the European Union and finally Japan (Mosl, 1990, pp. 66-83) – is also further developed in our earlier works (Beroun, 2011, pp. 365-389). In principal, given the tight interdependence of the Triad and its natural balancing tendency and bearing in mind that “there has been a formalized transatlantic cooperation between Europe and America (either under the Atlantic Charter of 1941 or the New Transatlantic Agenda of 1995) as well as between Asia and North America (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation founded in 1989 or subsequent Trans-Pacific Partnership founded in 2005), there should logically be a balancing harmony with formal establishment of the Eurasian dialogue (i.e. ASEM founded in 1996).” (Beroun, 2013)

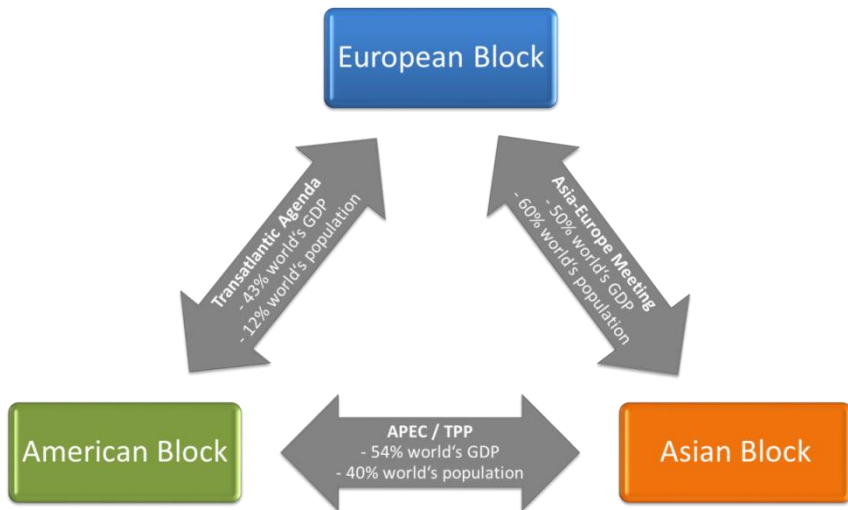
To sum up, “ASEM may be read either as an attempt to balance the role of the US in the region (particularly as a result of the EU's

¹⁷ Respecting the recent economic development and given the strengthened intraregional relations within the countries of the Triad regions, we can aggregate these countries in relation to their respective regions, i.e. North America, Europe and East Asia.

being refused observer status to APEC) or as a structural necessity to develop the third side of the EU-US-Asia triangle” (Gilson, 2002, p. 8). Such a triadic occurrence primarily demonstrates the added value through ASEM and also theoretical justification for the application of interregionalism as “a triadic phenomenon, driven by the mutually reinforcing processes of globalization and regionalization” (Rüland et al, 2006, p. 298). Finally, we can simplify the Triad process of natural balancing in the following economic interpretation.

Figure 1: Interregional Triadic Equilibrium

European Block (EU), American Block (North America), Asian Block (ASEAN + 3)



Source: Author's elaboration on the basis of economic statistics available at the International Monetary Fund and the European Commission (2012) (Beroun, 2013).

As we have researched earlier, we can outline four fundamental postulates supporting the need for balancing theory as a major contribution to interregionalism (Beroun, 2013). These postulates

also translate into the definition framework for understanding the meaning of the word “crisis” in the context of the ASEM process.

1. Complicated intraregional relations in East Asia burdened with historical suspicion, nationalism, economic protectionism, and security dilemmas make further integration impossible (Friedberg, 1994, pp. 5-33).
2. Incomplete (revisionist) hegemony of the US due to its unclear focus on the region (being in Afghanistan or Iraq) and due to its economic difficulties since 2008 question the traditional security guarantees provided by the US in North-East Asia since World War II (Mastanduno, 2003, pp. 141-170).
3. China is considered as a revisionist and generally dissatisfied desiring to restore its traditional regional hegemony through the tributary system (Shambaugh, 2006, pp. 23-47).
4. The world is turning into a G-2 model of economic and political dominance of the United States and China and greatly marginalized Europe owing to its crisis.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that majority of the authors dealing with the Asia-Europe Meeting accept the trilateral concept of

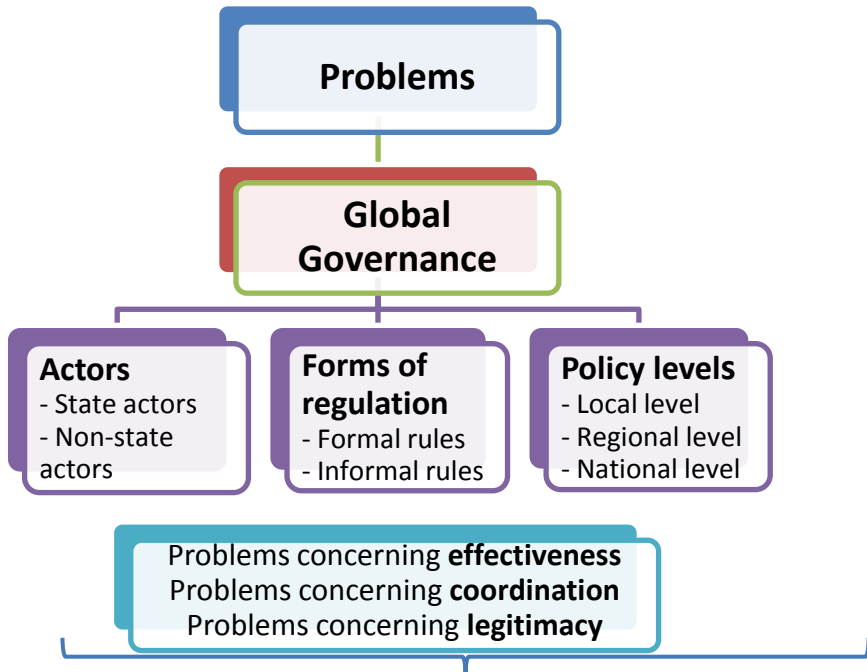
balancing and also despite the fact that the link between Europe and Asia is the weakest one, they fail to examine other (mainly neoliberal) aspects of this Triad. For instance, Julie Gilson says that:

“in the case of Asia-Europe relations, a structural triangular framework offers an even more convincing means of seeing the growth of regions in Asia and Europe as a necessary corollary to globalising trends.”(Gilson, 2002, p. 9)

Therefore, we will focus on the institutionalist narrative as a response to this one-sided balancing interpretation in the following text. In this perspective, we will evaluate how ASEM attempts to tackle the crisis in its understanding.

As an organizing principle we will use the structure of the global (multi-level) governance as drawn by Holger Mürle who starts the analysis with a certain problem that needs to be solved at the level of global (multi-level) governance (Mürle, 1998, p. 5). Depending on the actors involved in the solution, different forms of regulation at different policy levels are taken.

Figure 2: Elements of Global Governance (author's translation)



*Source: Holger Mürle, Global Governance: Literaturbericht und
Forschungsfragen (Mürle, 1998, p. 5).*

To conclude, we will evaluate the ASEM process as a process designed by state actors who cooperate on the basis of informal

(non-binding) rules at a(n) (inter)regional level. Finally, from the perspective of effectiveness, coordination and legitimacy, we will evaluate how such collaboration between two regions helps to transform other regions or the global community.

Empirical Implications: Qualitative Analysis of the ASEM Chair's Statement

As we have already indicated above, the informal Asia-Europe Meeting does not have a Secretariat that would produce any binding documents or secondary legislation. Therefore, the most important document is the so-called Chair's Statement that is signed by all 51 representatives of the ASEM partners. This quasi-doctrinal Statement is supposed to conclude all activities of the previous two-year ASEM presidency, demonstrate further progress of the ASEM process and to set the agenda for the following two years.

In the following section, we will conduct a qualitative comparative analysis of last two Chair's Statements concluding the 8th ASEM Summit in Brussels in 2010 (ASEM8, 2010), including an accompanying economic declaration, and the 9th ASEM Summit in

Vientiane in 2012 (ASEM9, 2012). These years have been chosen also with regard to the ongoing financial and economic crisis. It will be interesting to see whether the crisis had any impact on the interregional process.

All in all, the analysis attempts to illustrate whether there is any qualitative shift in the definition of the topics discussed, in the depth or extent of related issues and ASEM's responses. We will use the ASEM 8 Chair's Statement as a reference base for comparison with the ASEM 9 Chair's Statement. For clarity, we will quote directly the two Statements. Also, given the fact that the ASEM process is based on three pillars, the entire chapter will similarly be divided into three sections (i.e. economic, political and cultural cooperation).

Assessment of the Economic Pillar

The economic pillar as an initial source of the interregional process is one of the most important elements of the Asia-Europe Meeting. Concerning the analysis of the Final Statements, we will divide the economic chapter into two parts (i.e. global economic governance and sustainable development).

Global Economic Governance

Already at the beginning of the ASEM 8 Chair's Statement, it is quite remarkable to see that there is a special economic declaration attached which is called "Brussels Declaration on More Effective Global Economic Governance: Towards More Effective Global Economic Governance" (ASEM 8 Declaration, 2010). Given the fact that it is the result of the previous meeting of economic and finance ministers representing the ASEM partners, it also shows an obvious concern of the decision-makers regarding the ongoing economic and financial crisis. Moreover, this Declaration is attached to the main economic chapter of the Statement. Therefore, the core of the economic part of the main ASEM 8 Chair's Statement is based mainly on issues relating to sustainable development. This division can be considered as unique also given the fact that the ASEM 9 Chair's Statement is not accompanied by any special declaration and so the economic chapter remains fully united.

The ASEM 8 Declaration stressed that the economic crisis not only revealed fundamental weaknesses in the global economic and financial system, but is also showed the economic

interdependence among the world's economies. As a result, the Ministers agreed on giving:

“a new momentum to the cooperation between Europe and Asia with a view to promoting strong, sustainable, balanced and inclusive growth, restoring market confidence, strengthening the resilience and the transparency of the financial system, reforming the financial sector, contributing to the reform of the international financial institutions and spurring economic growth in developing countries”. (ASEM 8 Declaration, 2010, p. 1)

But how can be these ambitious goals achieved through the ASEM process? First, the Ministers signed who the ASEM 8 Declaration stressed the need for “a strong, sustainable and balanced growth and inclusive economies in Asia and in Europe” based on an equal cooperation of all ASEM partners. Given the high public deficits, non-sustainable debts and development gaps, they also expressed their commitment “to strengthen the sources of growth and to conduct structural reforms”. Owing to the diversity of global economy, they admitted that “policy actions must take account of possible spill-over effects and imbalances”.

When we look closer at the ASEM 9 Chair's Statement, its major economic part entitled "Reinforcing Economic Partnership" is also devoted to the challenges stemming from the current economic and financial crisis and to the need to further liberalize world trade in accordance with the Doha Round. In desiring an overall economic recovery, the leaders of ASEM 9 repeatedly stressed:

"the need for Asia and Europe to promote a closer engagement toward stronger and more dynamic partnership in addressing the current global crisis as well as paving the road in creating a stronger, more sustainable and balanced global growth". (ASEM 9, 2012, p. 2)

Furthermore, they repeated the principles of their closer cooperation, respecting pro-growth policies, continuing fiscal consolidation. They also noted the significance of growth and employment policies taking into account the social dimension, and finally, they commended the ongoing debates in this respect. To sum up, the ASEM 9 Chair's Statement does not bring any new significant elements in this regard and it only summarises what was already said at the 2010 ASEM 8 Summit.

Apart from the so called stimulus packages, the Ministers also reaffirmed in the ASEM 8 Declaration that “priority should be given to restoring market confidence and preserving recovery momentum (...), while containing inflationary pressures”. At the same time, credibility, crisis prevention, stability and certainty in the world economy should then be achieved through structural adjustment, financial safety nets and clearly communicated plans for fiscal consolidation, fiscal sustainability and economic growth protection. In this regard, the Ministers endorsed close cooperation with G-20 countries and the inclusion of the Asian Chiang Mai Initiative as well as the European Financial Stabilization Mechanism. In addition, macroeconomic shocks should be mitigated through “sound macroeconomic and financial policies”. The ministers also put emphasis on the reforms of financial regulation (mainly the regulation of financial derivatives), supervision, financial institutions, crisis management, or information exchange so as to achieve “a more efficient, resilient and reliable financial environment”. They also stressed “the importance of agreeing internationally a single set of high-quality accounting standards, applicable globally”.

A key part of the ASEM 8 Declaration is also devoted to the reform of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In order “to improve its credibility, legitimacy and effectiveness” and to “to adequately reflect the relative weight and responsibilities of the IMF members in the world economy,” the Ministers supported the continuation of the debate about an IMF quota reform that should in the end lead to reinforcement of the institution as well as to a stronger voting power of emerging markets and developing countries by at least 5%. Last but not least, they also expressed their support for increasing the voting power of developing and transition countries in the World Bank by 4.59 % compared to the 2008 level.

Concerning the ASEM 9 Chair’s Statement, the high representatives called again for “a reform of international financial institutions and global economic governance” and ambiguously acknowledged “the necessity of further strengthening inter-regional financial cooperation between Asia and Europe”. In this context, they only repeated the principles of economic recovery multilateral cooperation as well as the reform of the financial sector. Finally, they reconfirmed their commitment to reform the IMF as already mentioned above, and to strengthen

surveillance framework through the increase of available resources.

The final part of the ASEM 8 Declaration deals with the efforts to further open markets, liberalize trade and thus to “encourage more sustainable models of development, benefit developing countries and reduce poverty.” In this regard, the Ministers supported various initiatives related to “market access, cross-border investments, international assistance, actions on debts and technology transfers”. Furthermore, expecting “powerful economic stimulus for global sustained recovery”, they called for prompt conclusion of the WTO Doha Development Agenda and refused any protectionism and barriers to trade and investments. Also, they encouraged “deepening economic integration within and between both regions as a means to global recovery”. Finally, they recognised the importance of consultations and coordination among the ASEM and G-20 and various multilateral fora.

Finally, the ASEM 9 Chair’s Statement similarly underlined the importance of trade and investment liberalisation and facilitation. In this regard, they rhetorically endorsed deeper collaboration within the WTO system as well as their intention to bring the Doha Development Agenda to its conclusion. Apart from that, the

representatives repeated their commitment “to enhance inter-regional investment and trade flows through the market economy, open multilateral trading system, non-discriminatory liberalisation and open regionalism”. By praising various multinational fora and seminars, they also underlined “the importance of enhancing investment flows between Asia and Europe”. Given the objective to deepen economic relations as well as development cooperation between Europe and Asia, the leaders also put certain emphasis on intra and interregional connectivity projects (including Public Private Partnerships), which is basically the only new element in relation to the previous ASEM 8 Declaration.

Sustainable Economic Development

Given the two recent Final Statements of the Asia-Europe Meeting, the issues associated with sustainable economic development play a crucial role in the ASEM economic pillar. Concerning the ASEM 8 Chair’s Statement, the triad of objectives regarding the economic development, social cohesion and environmental protection are “the three mutually reinforcing and interdependent pillars of sustainable development leading to greater human well-being”. Additionally, the leaders confirmed

the importance of reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

As regards the economic development pillar, the ASEM 8 Chair's Statement basically summarises the above mentioned ASEM 8 Declaration by explicitly endorsing reforms leading to economic growth, trade facilitation and liberalization of domestic as well as international markets, completion of the WTO Doha Development Agenda, sustainable development policies respecting trade and development, environmentally-oriented and efficiency-oriented innovation, research and information exchange and the like. The only addition to this part is a certain accent on opening global and domestic agricultural markets and corresponding agricultural policies and programs ensuring sustainable food security as a means to reduce poverty. They even expressed an ambitious yet questionable vision to "phase out export subsidies, including through the WTO Doha-Round negotiations".

In the case of the ASEM 9 Chair's Statement, it primarily summarises main elements of the previous ASEM 8 Chair's Statement, including the triad structure of sustainable economic development. Also, it highlights various accompanying international initiatives. In this regard, the ASEM representatives

pointed out “the urgency of the establishment of the intergovernmental open-ended working group on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)”. However, in relation to the ASEM 8 Chair’s Statement, the ASEM 9 Chair’s Statement adds a descriptive chapter on food and energy security and water resources management. The ASEM leaders rhetorically endorsed their commitment to “promote sustainable food security in terms of availability, accessibility, diversity, utilization and to prevent further deforestation”.

Also, they acknowledged the close relationship between food security and climate change and thus they underlined the need for “fair and sustainable access to, and use of, water and land and promote the improvement of water productivity in water scarce areas”. Apart from encouraging the increase of production and productivity through the promotion of new investments and support for common actions, agreements, international conferences or involvement of a broad variety of actors, we can hardly notice any common binding actions specifically driven by ASEM in the ASEM 9 Chair’s Statement. In this regard, the ASEM leaders rather rhetorically endorsed the importance of energy security, efficiency, and research on new and renewable energy

resources as well as environmentally friendly technologies. Finally, they reasserted “collective efforts to promote sustainable usage and management of water resources” and related seminars and informal meetings organised under the ASEM framework. Though, there is not word about a joint position on the ongoing climate change conference.

As far as the second pillar – social cohesion – is concerned, the ASEM 8 Chair’s Statement mainly refers to “the creation of prosperity and on the equitable distribution of income”. The ASEM representatives considered job creation as a key element in this regard. Furthermore, they stressed the importance of various policy principles, such as the facilitation of labour migration, protection of the rights of workers, effective dialogue between social partners, job training and specific education, reforms of pension systems, putting into practice corporate social responsibility and social safety nets, ensuring livelihood security through poverty alleviation and so forth. However, apart from the vague pronouncement of the significance of close cooperation with the International Labour Organization and World Health Organization, the high representatives de facto do not offer any concrete solutions how all these ambitious goals (apart from

respecting them) should be achieved or what role the Asia-Europe Meeting should play in the respective implementation. In addition, the ASEM 9 Chair's Statement did not show any progress in this regard. It only repeats vaguely general values of employment and social policies.

In terms of the third and last pillar – environmental protection – the ASEM 8 Chair's Statement underlined "the necessity to address global climate change and recognized in this regard the centrality and legitimacy of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process". This basically explains why the ASEM leaders vaguely called for reaching a "fair, effective and comprehensive legally binding outcome under the mandate of the Bali Roadmap agreed in 2007". In this regard, they also supported significant cuts in global emissions. Again, a comprehensive ASEM-led approach towards the protection of environment is rather on a thin ice. Likewise, leaders "welcomed the commitments of the EU partners, Japan, Australia and New Zealand (...)", which clearly proves the preference of an approach led by individual nation-states (or by the EU as such).

In addition, the ASEM 8 representatives noted – in compliance with climate protection and the growing interdependence of

states on energy – the centrality of energy efficiency and security, renewable energy, market approach, technological advancement, corresponding information exchange and so forth. Finally, the ASEM 8 Chair’s Statement highlights the importance of sustainable forest and water resources management and corresponding international actions, biological diversity, promotion of green and low-carbon economy or contribution of the private sector and the involvement of civil society to equivalent policies.

The vagueness of the language used is even more apparent in the subsequent ASEM 9 Chair’s Statement where the leaders noted very briefly the need to “enhance cooperation in tackling climatechange” or to work together “to develop a protocol, another legal instrument or an agreed outcome with legal force as mandated by COP17 of the UNFCCC”. Again, this rhetorical remark hardly determines the role of ASEM in this policy practice.

In the final part of the ASEM 8 Chair’s Statement, the high representatives focused on the future of Asia-Europe sustainable development cooperation. Again, they repeated the centrality of Millennium Development Goals, while pointing out the use of creative financing modalities in accordance with adequacy, effectiveness and efficiency principles, and preservation of the

total amount of development assistance notwithstanding the world economic and financial crisis. Moreover, they endorsed information and good practise exchange. Also, they supported the use of “triangular forms of cooperation that combine resources and expertise from donor and recipient countries in the interest of efficient projects”.

Assessment of the Political Pillar

The chapter dealing with the political dialogue of the ASEM process is divided into two parts in both statements, namely the global and regional issues. The same structure will also be applied in the following qualitative analysis of these Statements.

Contemporary Global Issues

The chapter on contemporary global issues is a substantial part of every final ASEM Statement. The first part of the ASEM 8 Chair’s Statement is dealing with piracy (mainly at the sea off the coast of Somalia). It is quite clear from the Statement how important this issue is due to its negative impact on the trade between Asia and Europe. In 2010, the ASEM leaders underscored the crucial role of international law as well as the actions of United Nations in the international efforts against piracy and in safeguarding freedom

and security of the seas. Moreover, they called for the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and of other relevant agreements related to combating piracy and armed robbery, criminalization of piracy and armed robbery at seas. Also, the ASEM leaders supported the exchanges of best practices on anti-piracy in conjunction with the International Maritime Organization (IMO), training and sharing of intelligence among ASEM partners.

Also, a clear emphasis is put on the broad concept of security by underlining the aspects related to addressing the root causes of piracy, human security, protection of victims of piracy or eliminating the sources of poverty leading to piracy. Despite the fact that both European as well as Asian leaders refer to “outstanding examples of Europe and Asia working together on an issue of common interest”, there is no clear evidence that specifically ASEM helped to tackle the piracy at the sea off the coast of Somalia. The cooperation is rather based on the coordination of actions driven by the UN or by nation-states and their individual activities related to the prosecution of and disciplinary measures against pirates.

The ASEM 9 Chair's Statement also mentions the problem of piracy. Nevertheless, it basically uses exactly the same languages and does not show any further development in this regard, apart from the fact that leaders are calling for "a comprehensive approach, including measures on land". In addition, the ASEM leaders praised the Operation Atalanta, also known as the European Union Naval Force Somalia (EU – NAVFOR – ATALANTA) despite the fact that it is a military operation undertaken and financed primarily by the Naval Force of the European Union.

The next chapter of the ASEM 8 Chair's Statement is dealing with fighting terrorism and combating transnational organized crime. Again, the ASEM representatives reaffirmed the primary role of the UN initiatives and other international regimes in this regard and supported corresponding measures and strategies in accordance with international law, the UN Charter, the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and the relevant UN Security Council resolutions and conventions, and finally in accordance with the principles of protection of victims of acts of terrorism. Even though the ASEM representatives called for "disseminating best practices in support of the implementation of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (...)", we will not learn about how that

should be achieved concretely. Moreover, they expressed their concerns over transnational organized crime, illicit drug trafficking and the impact of corruption on trade, development, intellectual property rights, peace, security and the state of human rights protection. As far as the subsequent ASEM 9 Chair's Statement is concerned, it only notes the conclusions of the ASEM Counter Terrorism Conference as well as the United Nations' leading role in this regard. Also, the leaders reaffirmed rhetorically their pledge to boost the cooperation in fighting and preventing transnational organized crime, including trafficking in persons and illicit narcotic drug trafficking.

Afterwards, the ASEM 8 Chair's Statement underlines the need to discuss issues concerning human security, human rights and democracy in accordance with the United Nations rules, international law and democratic governance practice. Yet, given the problematic situation of the protection of human rights in many of the ASEM countries, it is quite startling that "they expressed their satisfaction with the dialogue carried out by partners through the informal ASEM Seminars on Human Rights held annually since 1998". Concerning the protection of human rights in the ASEM 9 Chair's Statement, only various international

initiatives and previous fora and seminars were briefly pointed out. In conclusion, apart from the alleged cooperation with civil society and international arena, the partners do not offer any solutions how the ASEM process could contribute to these issues.

A special attention of the ASEM 8 Chair's Statement is paid to disaster prevention, disaster relief and associated negative impact of climate change. By underlining "humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence" with regard to disaster relief, the ASEM representatives also stressed the importance of:

"disaster risk reduction through decreased exposure to risk, reduced vulnerability of humans and their property, sound environmental management, local capacity building and improved readiness in case of disasters".(ASEM 8, 2010, p. 12)

Regardless of explicitly cited possible cooperation within ASEM on:

"risk assessment, risk reduction strategies, early warning mechanisms, management capacities, search and rescue capacities, infrastructure development associated with relief and post disaster recovery, and other response activities (...)",(ASEM 8, 2010, p. 12)

(...) we can hardly identify any concrete contribution of the ASEM process. Similarly, the ASEM 9 Chair's Statement only summarises undertaken discussions and existing international fora on related topics. Finally, it specifically highlights the need for "collective preparedness and response to disasters and to reduce losses caused by man-made and natural disasters".

Another relatively significant part of the ASEM 8 Chair's Statement is devoted to the reform of the United Nations system. The basic idea is to "effectively address today's global challenges and ensure effective support for its members, particularly in addressing the needs of developing countries". Despite general unwillingness of the Western powers to make a compromise on this issue, the ASEM leaders agreed superficially on achieving "a more representative, more efficient and more effective UN Security Council". Furthermore, they called further for "a revitalized General Assembly, a strengthened ECOSOC, a well-managed Secretariat and effective, streamlined specialized agencies in the interest of system-wide coherence and increased sense of ownership on the part of the world community". As regards the ASEM 9, the Chair's Final Statement likewise puts emphasis on the same issues basically, while adding some aspects in terms of wider

support for developing countries, general efficiency and effectiveness, financial stability or regular policy reviews. Again, no concrete shared steps with regard to ASEM's activities were mentioned.

Finally, a more concrete part of the ASEM 8 Chair's Statement is dealing with nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. Naturally, the ASEM representatives recognised the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction as a major threat to international peace and security and as a mutual concern of the ASEM partners. By supporting the international cooperation and various agreements and conventions (such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and its Action Plan, New START Treaty, Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty or various conferences or specific activities of the International Atomic Energy Agency), they rhetorically endorsed their commitment to "the long term objective of a world free of nuclear weapons and of other weapons of mass destruction", including "nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation". In the ASEM 9 Chair's Statement, this chapter is extended by noting the importance of nuclear safety in connection with the 2011 disaster at Japan's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. Otherwise, the leaders recapitulate

analogic activities, conferences and summits related to this topic. In conclusion, the latter Statement does not bring any added value in relation to the previous one.

Contemporary Regional Issues

A significant part of the political pillar of both ASEM Statements is concerned with regional issues. On one hand, the Statements focus on purely Eurasian issues. For instance, in the ASEM 8 Chair's Statement, the representatives agreed that interregional "cooperative mechanisms are a force for peace, stability, prosperity, social development and cohesion". Furthermore, they stressed "the importance of effective regional architectures of security and cooperation in Asia and Europe based on mutual respect (...)".

In the succeeding part, the ASEM leaders recalled the increasing international role of the European Union after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty (2009). Similarly, they recognized "the centrality of ASEAN in regional cooperation in Asia" and also the entry into force of the ASEAN Charter (2008) and Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in South-East Asia (TAC) as an essential acceleratory factor of the ASEAN integration towards the ASEAN Community (2015). However, given the fact that these initiatives

are of a rather intraregional (local) character, it is quite remarkable that they are mentioned in the Statement of the interregional Asia-Europe Meeting. Again, relevance of this part is quite questionable. In this regard, the ASEM 9 Chair's Statement does not bring any new significant elements while it is considerably shortened at the same time.

On the other hand, various issues concerning contemporary international affairs are mentioned in both Statements. All in all, the ASEM leaders always refer to values such as peace, security, stability, compliance with international law standards, rule of law, democracy and the like. As far as the ASEM 8 Chair's Statement is concerned, it specifically focuses on the need to find a "comprehensive negotiated solution to restore international confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program". Also, reps called for a prompt renewal of the dialogue with the international community and for the compliance with UN Security Council resolutions and with requirements of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Similarly, the ASEM 9 Chair's Statement:

"called upon Iran to comply fully and without delay with all of its obligations under the relevant Resolutions of the UN

Security Council, and to meet the requirements of the IAEA Board of Governors and fully co-operate with the IAEA".
(ASEM 9, 2012, p. 12)

In connection with the situation in Afghanistan, the leaders representing the ASEM 8 Summit praised the organization of recent parliamentary elections. Additionally, they expressed their consent with the "international support for the Afghan government's efforts to achieve peace and stability". Last but not least, the ASEM representatives underlined the need to assist to Afghanistan in providing technical support and in helping to control the narcotics business and tackle the activities linked to international terrorism. The ASEM 9 Chair's Statement then underlines only the:

"support for reconstruction efforts, reconciliation and peaceful transition to democratic government in Afghanistan, including its path to self-reliance following the transition to Afghan-led security in 2014". (ASEM 9, 2012, p. 15)

As far as the recent developments in the Middle East are concerned, the ASEM 8 Chair's Statement supported the

continuation of direct talks between Israel and the Palestinian and the involvement of international partners contributing to these talks. Also, the Statement encourages the establishment of:

“an independent, sovereign, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security with Israel, both in a peaceful and stable region”.

(ASEM 8, 2010, p. 16)

Last but not least, the leaders openly criticised the Israeli settlers for expanding and enlarging their settlements and called for a legal settlement under the international law. While acknowledging that the current situation in Gaza is not sustainable, the leaders also called for a comprehensive approach based on the involvement of all countries in completing the Middle East Peace Process. In terms of the ASEM 9 Chair's Statement, the representatives repeated their support for a two-state solution and warned on “the current financial difficulties of the Palestinian Authority and called on the international community to urgently support the Palestinian Authority (...)”. Interestingly enough, there is no concrete word about the situation in Syria or any comment on the Arab Spring revolutions.

While the question of Myanmar was completely omitted in the ASEM 9 Chair's Statement, the leaders of the 8th ASEM Summit endorsed the indication of democratic transition of this Southeast Asian state and they also expressed their support for the involvement of the international community. Both Statements also pay special attention to the situation in the Korean Peninsula. They basically underscored the need for a peace and stability settlement in Korea through the continuation of Six-Party Talks and they also urged "all parties to fulfil their commitments" concerning international law, UN Security Council resolutions as well as the prohibition of proliferation of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction.

Assessment of the Cultural Pillar

The very last and most concise chapter of both the ASEM Chair's Statements is dealing with cultural aspects of interregional cooperation in Europe and Asia. Concretely, the ASEM 8 Chair's Statement divides this chapter into three points, i.e. people to people, visibility and finally the future of ASEM. For instance, the leaders promoted rhetorically:

“further people-to-people contacts and interaction between businesses, merchants, academics, students, opinion makers, media representatives, culture professionals, civil society representatives and local and regional leaders.”(ASEM 8, 2010, p. 18)

In this regard, they also praised tourism as a cultural factor of inter-connectivity between Europe and Asia. In the subsequent paragraphs, the leaders mentioned the importance of other non-governmental dialogues such as the Parliamentary Partnership Meetings, People’s Forum and finally the Business Forum. In terms of education cooperation, they welcomed the establishment of the ASEM Education Secretariat in Bonn and Cooperation Center in Seoul as well as continuation of the Education Ministers meetings, Bologna Policy fora, Erasmus Mundus, Trans-Eurasian Information Network for research and education exchanges and finally the so called ASEM-DUO fellowship programs. Finally, the reps emphasized that:

“joint science and technology initiatives play a central role in achieving scientific, technological and social advances in the face of common challenges, in particular the one of advancing sustainable development.” (ASEM 8, 2010, p. 18)

Regarding cultural cooperation, the representatives not only endorsed higher involvement of government and civil society in this area, but they also stressed that:

“raising awareness about cultural heritage and about treasures of the past constituted a key step towards overcoming ignorance and prejudice and towards promoting mutual understanding and cooperation.” (ASEM 8, 2010, p. 19)

In addition, they applauded an exhibition about the coexistence of Asia and Europe, the activities of the Asia-Europe Foundation. Also, they praised the “significant increase in ASEM’s internal and external visibility”. Given the quasi-doctrinal character of the ASEM Final Statement, it is a bit ridiculous that they expressed satisfaction with the use of the ASEM’s logo by Belgium during its Presidency of the 8th ASEM summit.

Finally, another interesting but rather shallow chapter is concerned with the so called dialogue of cultures and civilizations. Due to its alleged contribution to “the maintenance of international peace and security”, this subchapter was initially placed in the political pillar. Yet, leaders symbolically recalled the

importance of international fora and various “ongoing ASEM initiatives constituting significant contributions to the enrichment of Asian and European cultures and faiths and to the deepening of Asia-Europe relations”. In this regard, they most probably referred to the activities of the above mentioned Asia-Europe Foundation.

Concerning the 9th ASEM Summit, the associated Statement has many more details than the previous ASEM 8 Chair’s Statement. Also, the structure of the culture-related chapter seems to be more sophisticated given its segmentation into parts such as the people-to-people interactions, human resources development and education, employment and social policies, cultural cooperation, tourism and the Asia-Europe Foundation. Nevertheless, given the rather vague and repetitive language, it is hard to detect any significant advancement in relation to the previous ASEM 8 Chair’s Statement.

An added value is a clear accent on human resources development and education that was previously part of the economic part of the ASEM 8 Chair’s Statement. In this regard, the leaders highlight these issues as factors of poverty reduction and socio-economic development. Accordingly, they discuss various opportunities for

improvement, such as capacity building, training, vocational education or lifelong learning.

Also, tourism as a new element of the Statement should contribute to:

“promoting of better understanding and enhancing connectivity between peoples of the two regions, as well as to job creation, economic growth and development, and they agreed to further strengthen cooperation in this area.”
(ASEM 9, 2012, p. 14)

Similarly, the ASEM 9 Chair’s Statement highlights “the cultural and economic contributions made by migrants and migrant workers to receiving societies and their communities of origin”. Nevertheless, apart from describing various general aspects of migration such as the economic importance in the current crisis, protection of human rights, informal discussions and so forth, the Statement does not specify clearly how ASEM should be involved in this process. In addition, the ASEM 9 leaders stressed the significance of the interfaith dialog with respect to:

“its contribution to promoting social cohesion, peace, and development in the context of increasing societal

interdependence and religious and cultural diversity in Asia and Europe.” (ASEM 9, 2012, p. 14)

Finally, they specifically mentioned the good practice of an inter-religious dialogue, mutual understanding, tolerance, cultural cooperation and exchanges, diversity of faiths, religions, languages and cultures. Again, they noted the outcomes of various international dialogues as well as those organized under the framework of the ASEM process.

In conclusion, despite the seemingly deeper and more detailed structure of the third culture-related pillar, continuing extremely vague and shallow language gives an impression of a very low progress or even stagnation over the past two years.

Reflection of Interregionalism: ASEM and the Crisis (2010 – 2012)

In the following chapter, we will focus on the final reflection of the ASEM interregional process during the crisis. The chapter is divided into two parts. The first part draws final conclusions from the qualitative analysis of the ASEM Chair's Statements in the light of the initial ambitious plans and strategies. The second part represents a contribution to the debate over the

potential development and direction of interregionalism as such. In this regard, we will also demonstrate how an alternative example of interregional cooperation fits into the debate over changing the concept of interregionalism.

Limits of Interregionalism in the ASEM Context

Firstly, after almost two decades of its existence, the Asia-Europe Meeting has not fulfilled the greatly ambitious European Commission's Communications intent to establish a "comprehensive strategic framework for our relations with Asia and its subregions in the coming decade" (European Commission, 2001, p. 3).

Secondly, the ASEM process lacks an implementation body to determine and supervise how to fulfil its ambitious goals and visions and what resources to use to bring the plans to life. In this regard, the European Commission's 2001 Communication envisages a more formalized and coordinated cooperative framework, but the Commission has yet to bring the framework into practice:

"in order for this Strategic Framework to be fully effective, it is essential that there is a proper consistency between the

objectives being set, and the resources available to meet them (both in terms of staff and operational resources in headquarters and in the field, and in terms of the budgetary resources available for our cooperation programmes)."

(European Commission, 2001, p. 26)

Thirdly, regarding the Chair's Statements, despite the ongoing financial and economic crisis, there is no qualitative advancement between the 8th ASEM Summit in Brussels (2010) and the 9th ASEM Summit in Vientiane (2012). By reading the Statements, we can only identify issues and problems that are generally important for both regions. Rather than a platform for action, ASEM is limited to being a platform of defining of key issues.

Concerning the economic pillars of both Statements, they only summarise in a shallow and vague way various fundamental principles of economic governance and their positive effects on individual countries. Even though it would perfectly fit into those values and principles, we cannot expect a clear plan to launch the negotiations for a Eurasian Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Therefore, unsurprisingly, the EU and its Asian partners prefer to liberalize trade on a bilateral level, as is the case of the EU-Korea FTA, EU-Singapore FTA, EU-Japan FTA and so forth. Apart from

changes in the order of selected economic chapters, updates in other chapters or different emphasis on the constantly proclaimed “need for further cooperation”, the economic part of the ASEM Statements has not reached any visible progress between the crisis years of 2010 and 2012.

Regarding the political pillar of both Statements are concerned, there is a certain emphasis on various determinants influencing the political and security environment, such as human (livelihood) security, energy security, food security, economic stability and so on. As we have already argued earlier:

“The security concept of ASEM is inherently a concept of preventive diplomacy at the most universal and non-interventional level, and concept of a shared collective identity and values (economic, political or cultural) rather than a unilateral protection of binding goals and policies. It is thus obvious that the ASEM concept is an extended concept of structural (root) prevention represented by the Copenhagen School.”(Lund, 1996, p. 37)

In summary, the principal contribution of ASEM to Eurasian political relations is based on defining key issues and on rhetorical

support for confidence-building measures (CBM) between Europe and Asia, compliance with international law, shared values and creation of socially constructed security community (Buzan, 1998), and activities within the UN system, multilateralism or soft power (Nye, 2005). However, given the complete lack of operational tools and formality, the interregional cooperation in the context of ASEM is restricted only to classification of current problems and does not disclose the ASEM's role.

Concerning the cultural pillar, its language is noticeably empty regarding continuous enlargement through new partners becoming members of the interregional process. Even though the enlargement might appear to be a political success, in the end it leads to even greater shallowness and informality of the interregional cooperation outlined in both Statements. Defining a Eurasian cultural space in such a context is thus extraordinarily awkward.

In conclusion, the shallow, repetitive and rather ambiguous Statements clearly show that in its current interregional format, ASEM cannot go beyond defining problems. Rather than becoming a "comprehensive strategic framework," the ASEM interregional process turned into a "talk shop". Therefore, the ASEM process,

which is based on a neorealist narrative, fails in the proceeding ways to follow Holger Mürle's structure of global governance (Mürle, 1998, p. 5):

1. We are aware of the fact that there are global challenges to be tackled through a multi-level or global governance framework (i.e. the four above mentioned postulates, G-2 model of international relation, economic crisis and various imbalances, piracy, climate change, protectionism, unsustainable forms of economic growth, high rates of unemployment etc.).
2. We know the actors that should tackle the challenges (i.e. 51 European as well Asian partners).
3. These actors have informal rules of regulation only (i.e. non-binding) and cannot solve the challenges in a proactive and efficient way.
4. Therefore, the (inter)regional policy narrative at the level of global or multi-level governance cannot be applied given the lack of effectiveness, coordination and legitimacy.

In conclusion, ASEM is too flexible (in terms of agenda-setting) and too inclusive (in terms of enlargement). Additionally, given the

incapability of ASEM to react proactively to various challenges influencing its Member States, we cannot consider this interregional framework to be a fully-fledged contribution to multi-level or global governance. Interregionalism in the context of the Asia-Europe Meeting will not result in the establishment of the “Eurasian Century” of leadership.

Furthermore, ASEM can hardly strengthen or substitute the missing link between Europe and Asia as efficiently as it has been achieved in the case of APEC. Furthermore, it is quite improbable that ASEM could balance the G-2 model of international relations.

Neoliberal Narrative as a Response

Considering the current limits of the Asia-Europe Meeting as an interregional structure based predominantly on soft balancing, we can determine a number of crucial consequences from the prevailing debate over interregionalism.

Firstly, despite the existence of obvious challenges and problems among the main actors, the contemporary debates that concentrate on the neorealist interpretation of interregionalism

fail to enhance the interregional structure beyond shallow and vague balancing statements typical of ASEM.

Secondly, the neorealist debate excludes formal structures that are not primarily state-driven. However, ASEM's non-interventionist-based interregional framework did not lead to a more efficient, responsive and functional cooperation that would upgrade current bilateral relations among the member states or multilateral relations with international institutions. It is evident that ASEM lacks the socialisation aspect necessary for organizing and coordinating supranational processes (Risse, 2009, p. 174).

In light of ASEM's shortcomings, we strongly recommend that the alternative approaches of international relations – neoliberalism and constructivism – be strengthened in the current debate over interregionalism. For the interregional context of ASEM, we will refer mainly to the institutional narrative (descending liberalism), which is based on the premise that institutions (e.g. an eventual "ASEM Secretariat" or any kind of headquarters) will control and manage the agenda set by governments, formalize the initially non-binding policy processes, foster communication and socialisation through spillover effect and mobilization of resources, bargain jointly profitable arrangements and mutually

beneficial compromises, and finally take responsibility for supervision and scrutiny over the quality of implementation of policies promoted on the interregional policy level. David Harvey further develops this concept by saying:

“Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money.”(Harvey, 2007, p. 2)

In summary, such an institution would facilitate the continual reshaping and redefining of goals, policies, actions, and participants. Also, because ASEM is basically coordinated by politicians, the “ASEM Secretariat” as a coordinative body would not depend on different political cycles in countries and political lives of politicians.

Additionally, an “ASEM Secretariat” would go beyond a simple platform of information exchange and would help upgrade the interregional dialogue into a real interregional community – supraregionalism – that would provide extra support for continuity, collective patterns of behaviours and collective actions, historical path dependency, predictability, mediation, and finally it would strengthen the natural cooperative identity (social interaction), identification with the interregional process and self-reflection.

Furthermore, the concept of an efficient interregionalism would be able to respond to the main four challenging postulates mentioned above. A formalized policy process can help mitigate security dilemmas in East Asia, reduce the risks of Washington’s disinterest in the region, find a place for China in the region by guaranteeing it a negotiation platform and reduce the risks of one-sided Asia-Pacific axis of influence and marginalisation of Europe.

We now need to ask ourselves a question how far the institutionalisation of an interregional process can go. The answer will mainly depend on the capability of creating norms that – as Peter Joachim Katzenstein argues – have binding, constitutive or regulatory effect (Katzenstein, 1996, p. 54). In the end, norms can

at least lead to a common comprehension of standards and shape the interregional process with the purpose to decrease uncertainty and increase predictability of the system. Following this argument, in accordance with Andreas Hasenclever, Peter Mayer and Volker Rittberger, we will outline three levels of institutionalisation (Hasenclever et al, 1997, pp. 14-17). The first level – behavioural – represents a loose regime that does not shape behaviours of its actors and has thus rather a limited impact (ASEM today). The second level – cognitive – promotes shared understanding and deeper and regular communication on the institutional basis (APEC Secretariat). On the third level – formal terms – formal international institutions are created with complex bureaucracy, strict rules and clearly defined decision-making processes (EU).

The most obvious objections to the third level of institutionalisation of the interregional process are the diversity of Asia, Asia's difficulties in closer integration of the region and insistence on non-interventionism. Even though we may argue that the ASEAN Community – inspired by the integration model of the EU – may pop up by 2015, we need to underline that the eventual institutional element in interregionalism would not imply

integration as seen in the EU. Rather, it would imply a binding cooperative and coordinative framework and support mechanism for the high-level ASEM process with minimum budgetary demands and bureaucracy.

Since the ASEM process was also EU's reaction to APEC (i.e. another example of interregional process), we will look at the second level of institutionalisation which could serve as an inspiration for ASEM:

"The APEC Secretariat is based in Singapore and operates as the core support mechanism for the APEC process. It provides coordination, technical and advisory support as well as information management, communications and public outreach services. The APEC Secretariat performs a central project management role, assisting APEC Member Economies and APEC fora with overseeing more than 250 APEC-funded projects. APEC's annual budget is also administered by the APEC Secretariat.

The APEC Secretariat is headed by an Executive Director, Dr Alan Bollard. 2009 marked the last year when the position will be held on an annually rotating basis by an officer of

Ambassadorial rank from the host economy. From 2010 the appointment has been made on a three-year fixed-term basis and is open to professional candidates from any of APEC's 21 member economies. The APEC Secretariat is staffed by a small team of program directors, seconded from APEC Member Economies. In addition, professional staff fulfil specialist and support functions at the APEC Secretariat.”(APEC Secretariat, 2013)

Even though the APEC process is not a central subject of this paper, we will complete the theoretical picture by quoting Carlos Kuriyama who evaluates the empirical achievements of APEC and its role in the ongoing creation of an interregional free trade area under the framework of the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP):

“APEC is important for TPP as incubator of ideas that could be taken into account in the present negotiations. In the same way, TPP is relevant for APEC as one of many avenues to strengthen regional economic integration across the APEC region.” (Kuriyama, 201, p. 3)

Given the clear focus on trade liberalisation, it remains to be seen if the ASEM process will also follow the second level of institutionalisation and result in a “Eurasian Partnership Agreement”, as in the presented case of APEC and TPP.

Conclusion

The paper presented the basic ways of understanding the interregional interaction in the case of Asia-Europe Meeting in the crisis period 2010 – 2012. The main goal of the paper was thus to evaluate interregionalism as a policy approach at the level of global (multi-level) governance with a particular focus on the Asia-Europe Meeting as given a case study (basic type of interregionalism). In addition, we intended to develop further the theoretical conceptualisation of interregionalism and to revive the stagnating debate over this concept.

Since its establishment in 1996, the Asia-Europe Meeting has developed from a conference into an ambitious process of regular interregional meetings comprising 49 Asian and European Member States and two international institutions. We defined interregionalism – contrary to the traditionally accepted approach

among scholars based on neorealist and geopolitical narrative of interregionalism – as an applicable policy approach at the level of global (multi-level) governance.

By analyzing thoroughly the primary documents presented at the birth of the ASEM process, biannual Chair's Statements as well as real activities carried out by ASEM, we have concluded that the ASEM as an interregional body has not fulfilled the key goals for which it was established almost two decades ago. The shallow, repetitive and rather ambiguous Statements clearly demonstrate that ASEM – in its current flexible and exclusively state-driven interregional framework – cannot go beyond defining problems in the global governance cycle, notwithstanding the ongoing economic and financial crisis. Rather than becoming a comprehensive strategic framework, the ASEM interregional process remains an ordinary debate club and confidence-building platform.

Therefore, with regard to the innovative neoliberalist (and partly constructivist) narrative, the ASEM leaders should consider to establish an institutional implementation body (ASEM Secretariat) to determine and supervise how to fulfill the ambitious goals and visions and what resources to use to bring the plans to

life. In the end, such a transformation of interregionalism might lead to the creation of rule-based (normative) supraregionalism. Also, given the similarities between the ASEM and APEC processes and the identical starting points related to their existence, ASEM leaders should find an inspiration in the APEC framework organized (alternative – advanced type of interregionalism) by the so-called APEC Secretariat.

In conclusion, ASEM is too flexible (in terms of agenda-setting) and too inclusive (in terms of enlargement). Given the incapability of ASEM to react proactively to various challenges influencing its Member States, we cannot consider this interregional framework to be a fully-fledged contribution to multi-level or global governance. Additionally, interregionalism in the context of the Asia-Europe Meeting will not result in the establishment of the “Eurasian Century” of leadership, despite the unquestionable need for more result-oriented policy patterns in this regard. Also, interregionalism as a policy approach cannot be reduced to a loose interaction of nation states or regions as it will require a properly organized cooperation framework to attain the advanced (institutionalized) type of interregionalism. Finally, the bilateral

framework of cooperation between individual Asian and European states is much more efficient at this moment.

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